SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188

| | |
|---|---|
| 1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED | 1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS |
| 2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY | 3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED |
| 2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE | |
| 4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) | 5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) |
| 6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION: OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT; 6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable): C | 7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION |
| 6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code): NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI 02841 | 7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) |
| 8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION; 8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) | 9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER |
| 8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) | 10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS: PROGRAM ELEMENT NO; PROJECT NO; TASK NO; WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO. |

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)
JAPANESE OPERATIONAL PLANS IN WORLD WAR II: SHORTFALLS IN CRITICAL ELEMENTS (U)

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)
THOMAS J. CULORA, LCDR, USN

| 13a. TYPE OF REPORT | 13b. TIME COVERED | 14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) | 15. PAGE COUNT |
|---|---|---|---|
| FINAL | FROM _____ TO _____ | 8 FEB 1994 | 32 |

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

| 17. COSATI CODES | | |
|---|---|---|
| FIELD | GROUP | SUB-GROUP |
| | | |
| | | |

18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)
JAPANESE, WORLD WAR II, OPERATIONAL PLANNING

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

NEARLY FIFTY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE END OF WWII IN THE PACIFIC THEATER OF OPERATIONS. SINCE THEN, THE REASONS AND ELEMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO AMERICA'S VICTORY AND JAPAN'S DEFEAT HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTINGLY ANALYZED BY SCHOLARS AND HISTORIANS. THIS ESSAY WILL EXAMINE JUST ONE ELEMENT OF THAT WAR -- JAPANESE OPERATIONAL PLANS. THE THESIS OF THIS PAPER IS THAT KEY AND RECURRING COMPONENTS IN JAPANESE WAR PLANS DID NOT SUPPORT ATTAINMENT OF THEIR OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES. THE ESSAY WILL IDENTIFY CENTRAL ELEMENTS IN JAPANESE DOCTRINE, OPERATIONAL LEVEL TACTICS, TRAINING, AND LEADERSHIP. THESE ELEMENTS WILL BE EXPLORED AGAINST THE HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF THREE JAPANESE OPERATIONS: THE PLAN TO INVADE NEW GUINEA; THE ATTACK ON MIDWAY; AND THE PLAN TO REPEL THE U.S. LANDING ON THE PHILIPPINES. FROM THIS, SEVERAL KEY AND RECURRING SHORTFALLS IN THE JAPANESE OPERATION PLANS WILL EMERGE.

| 20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT | 21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION | |
|---|---|---|
| ☒ UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☐ SAME AS RPT. ☐ DTIC USERS | UNCLASSIFIED | |
| 22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL: CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT | 22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code): (401) 841-3414 | 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL: C |

DD Form 1473, JUN 86 — Previous editions are obsolete. — SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

S/N 0102-LF-014-6603

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

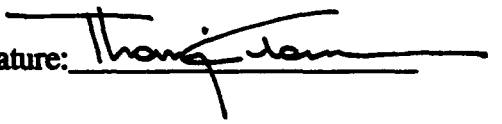
# JAPANESE OPERATIONAL PLANS IN WORLD WAR II: SHORTFALLS IN CRITICAL ELEMENTS

by

Thomas J. Culora
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of the paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

17 June 1994

Paper directed by
H.W. Clark, Jr., Captain, U.S. Navy
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

## Abstract of
## JAPANESE OPERATIONAL PLANS IN WORLD WAR II: SHORTFALLS IN CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Nearly fifty years have passed since the end of World War Two in the Pacific theater of operations. Since then, the reasons and elements that contributed to America's victory and Japan's defeat have been exhaustingly analyzed by scholars and historians. This essay will examine just one element of that war-- Japanese operational plans. The thesis of this paper is that key and recurring components in Japanese war plans did not support attainment of their operational objectives. The essay will identify central elements in Japanese doctrine, operational level tactics, training, and leadership. These elements will be explored against the historical backdrop of three Japanese operations: the plan to invade New Guinea; the attack on Midway; and the plan to repel the U.S. landing on the Philippines. From this, several key and recurring shortfalls in the Japanese operational plans will emerge. The paper will conclude with a brief discussion of key lessons which remain as valid today as they were a half-century ago.

## PREFACE

As expected, much has been written in the past fifty years about World War II. The literature, as well as original source material is especially rich for the historian interested in the the naval aspect of the war in the Pacific. After all, it was the Navy's war. However, original Japanese source material and documents are somewhat limited. This is due, in part, because many Imperial Navy documents were destroyed in the final months of the war, and in part, because only a portion of these have been translated into English. Most of the original source material was translated in conjunction with the preparation of Samuel E. Morison's History of United States Naval Operations in World War II; and after being microfilmed, this material was returned to Japan in 1958. Based on these documents and other information, the Japanese Defense Agency's War History Section is preparing an official Japanese account of the war. This project, already totaling ninety volumes, will unlikely be translated into English. However, Paul S. Dull's A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy encapsulates this effort and provides the Japanese perspective on many crucial battles.

The U.S. Naval Institute's The Japanese Navy in World War II is a compilation of essays written by former officers of the Imperial Navy, which originally appeared in Proceedings. This book is helpful in understanding how key battles and campaigns were planned and executed from the Japanese commanders point-of-view. In addition, interviews of Japanese naval officers, conducted by the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, was collated into two volumes entitled Interrogations of Japanese Officials. This work also provides fascinating insight into Japanese ideas and thoughts in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Books which provided key information on the case studies included: Midway: the Battle that Doomed Japan by Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya; and The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy by Masanori Ito with Roger Pineau.

Lastly, Richard W. Bate's strategical and tactical analyses of the battles of Coral Sea, Midway,and Leyte Gulf, written in the late 1940's at the Naval War College, provide an excellent starting point to review any of these key naval engagements.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# JAPANESE OPERATIONAL PLANS IN WORLD WAR II: SHORTFALLS IN CRITICAL ELEMENTS

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

" The plans of staff officers ashore sometimes seem reckless to those who are experienced in combat at sea."[1]

On Sunday, September 2, 1945, a delegation of nine Japanese officials stood solemnly on the deck of the USS MISSOURI to sign the surrender documents which would formally end Japan's war with America and its allies. It was undoubtedly difficult for these men to presage this moment, when, in the opening months of the Pacific war, the Imperial Navy had been so successful. The pride and anticipation of imminent victory they surely felt during those months was in stark contrast to the sepulchral and humiliating emotions flooding their hearts that day.

Why did Japan fail? The answer to this lay in numerous and complex elements which are interwoven into the operational and strategic tapestry of World War II and have been exhaustingly explored by scholars and analysts for over fifty years. This essay will examine one thread of that tapestry-- shortfalls in critical elements in the Japanese operational plans. The thesis of this paper is that key and recurring components in Japanese operational level war plans did not support attainment of their operational objectives. To examine this, Imperial Navy doctrine, tactics, training and leadership will be reviewed to establish an analytical framework. This framework will be used to examine three case studies: [1] Operation MO, the Japanese invasion of New Guinea. [2] Operation MI, the planned capture of Midway. And [3] Operation Sho, the repelling of the U.S. landing on the Philippines. Each operation reflects differing strategic goals. The thrust to New Guinea was an offensive operation designed to disrupt the Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) between the U.S. and Australia. Operation MI was also offensive, but was designed to lure the U.S. Fleet into a decisive battle at a time when the Imperial Navy was at its zenith. And

[1] Vice Admiral Kurita remarking on the orders he received from Combined Fleet Headquarters during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, October 1944. Quoted in Masanori Ito with Roger Pineau, The End of the Japanese Imperial Navy, trans. Andrew Y. Kuroda and Roger Pineau ( New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 179.

[redacted], Operation Sho, was primarily defensive and occurred in the last year of the war when Japanese naval power was at its lowest.

## CHAPTER II

## KEY ELEMENTS REVIEWED

**Doctrine.** What was Japan's naval doctrine? To answer this it is important to identify the main factors that drive the formulation of doctrine--these factors are: first, who is the anticipated enemy, and second, what is their relative economic and military strength. Clearly, Japan viewed the United States as the only real impediment to its hegemony in the western Pacific. America would undoubtedly be the main foe. It was also accepted that Japan's economic and resource base would never match that of the United States. Even if Japan established secure sources of raw materials, these sources would always be vulnerable. Moreover, whatever military advantage Japan could establish over the U.S. would eventually disappear once America was fully committed to war.

From these two main factors, two divergent doctrines emerged. The first doctrine postulated that the primary way to secure victory was through a decisive battle waged against the enemy fleet. The second view focused on a defensive posture which relied on a relatively small number of ships to act as a fleet-in-being.

Both views had supporters in the Imperial Navy. The defensive posture was mostly favored by the Naval General Staff. Prominent senior officers such as Takijiro Onishi, Shigeyoshi Inouye, and Nagano Osami,[2] firmly believed that a defensive, attrition-based doctrine would afford the best opportunity for victory.[3]

The opposing view, which favored a "decisive victory" doctrine, was championed by the Combined Fleet Staff and, perhaps more importantly, counted Isoroku Yamamoto as its most influential supporter. This doctrine inherently embodied a more aggressive, offensive strategy. But even Yamamoto had mixed views towards this doctrine. On one hand he realized that the Japanese Navy could not win with a purely defensive posture because it would give the initiative to the Americans who could determine when and how to meet the Imperial Fleet. Conversely, he noted that in previous war games a decisive victory was never achieved and the games "were

[2] Osami was serving as chief of Naval General Staff in September 1940.

[3] Yoichi Hirama, "Japanese Naval Preparations for World War II," Naval War College Review 44 (Spring 1991), pp. 75-76.

suspended when it appeared that Japanese forces would be gradually whittled away."[4]

Interestingly, both of these doctrines were born out of a sense of material inferiority that the Japanese felt throughout the 1920's and 1930's. This sense of material inferiority and the "underdog mentality" that resulted, influenced many naval officers and affected all phases of naval planning from strategy to weapons design and procurement.

The inability to firmly commit to either doctrine is evidenced by the types of weapons the Japanese designed and procured. While the keels for the super battleships YAMATO and MUSASHI were being laid, plans were put in motion to increase the submarine force. As a result, by the end of the war over 126 submarines were built.[5] While the battleship reflected a weapon capable of winning the "decisive battle" as it was envisioned by the Japanese in late 1930's, the submarine, as the Japanese would come to employ it, was thought to be primarily a weapon of interception and attrition.

By December 1941, through the influence of Yamamoto, the "decisive battle" doctrine prevailed. The opening salvo in the Pacific war, the grand attack on Pearl Harbor, was affirmation that this doctrine was in force. When interviewed after the war, Captain Toshikzu Ohmae remarked, that he "believed too much emphasis was put on the offensive in our (Japanese) naval thinking and in our War College Training."[6] Moreover, this doctrine will drive the strategy that directed all of the Japanese operational plans. But as we shall see from the case studies, the inability of the Japanese naval leadership to firmly commit to either doctrine will complicate their war plans and sow the seeds of failure.

Tactics. The "decisive battle" doctrine, in large part, defined the tactics which would be used to execute the operational plans. Tactics, in a broad sense, exists at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. For the purposes of this essay, we will focus on those tactics employed at the operational level.

The operational level tactics used by the Imperial Navy can be distilled into two general categories-- surprise and outranging.

---

[4] Ibid., p. 75.

[5] Ito and Pineau, p. 24.

[6] Captain Ohmae was a very experienced naval officer serving in the Imperial Navy and had been involved in the planning for defense of the Marianas and Philippines as Chief-of-Staff to Vice Admiral Ozawa, CinC First Mobile and Third Fleets. United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS). Interrogation of Japanese Officials, vol. 1. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office,1946), p. 176.

Surprise was an essential operational tactic used throughout the war in the Pacific and can be sub-divided into two key components-- secrecy and deception. Integral to virtually every operational plan was the use of the element of surprise. The caricature of the "sneaky oriental" common in wartime propaganda is a gross misrepresentation. Nonetheless, the Japanese sought to fold into their operational plans the best elements of the "Sun Tzu" style of war fighting. In each of the case studies, surprise, secrecy, and deception are significant elements.

Outranging is the second primary operational tactic which most of the Japanese plans were built around. Outranging permeated practically every aspect of naval planning in the air, on the surface, and undersea.

On the surface, the idea was to deploy large, heavily-armored, "unsinkable" battleships and battle crusiers to engage the enemy outside his effective weapons range. Japan could only afford to build a small number of "big ships with big guns," thus, quality, not quantity was the rule.[7] This fit in nicely with the decisive battle doctrine wherein a large ship could mass superior firepower upon the enemy. However, the big ship idea did not fit in well with attrition style warfare where it is assumed a few units will be sacrificed in the course of the overall campaign. In addition, the emphasis on night fighting, with large ships slugging it out in the dark, was incorporated into operational tactics as early as 1927. [8] Japanese training will also stress this concept.

By 1937, Japan no longer adhered to the Washington or London Treaties which put severe restrictions on the number, size, and strength of naval combatants Japan could build. The pinnacle of the outranging concept by surface ships was reflected in the YAMATO class battleship which carried 18.1 inch guns with a range of 40,000 meters. As Hirama points out, "these behemoths, though running counter to the new emphasis on aviation, were monuments to the strength of the outranging idea."[9] They were certainly capable of outranging and out gunning any ship afloat in a conventional surface-to-surface fleet engagement.

Outranging as an operational tactic in undersea warfare could be used to support either the decisive battle or attrition doctrines. As a weapon of attrition-interception, the submarine relied on the torpedo as its main weapon. At a range of 40,000 meters running at 32 knots, the type 91

[7] Ito and Pineau, p. 12.

[8] Hirama, p. 67.

[9] Ibid., p. 72.

oxygen torpedo had more than five times the range of U.S. and British torpedoes.[10] With this range and speed it was a potent weapon against a surface combatant in either attrition warfare or as an element in the decisive battle. In addition, in 1933, the Navy began work on a midget submarine which tacticians believed, "if properly developed, would give the inferior Japanese fleet an edge in the decisive battle."[11] Thus, the Imperial Navy was well positioned to utilize the submarine in a wide range of missions encompassing either the decisive battle or attrition-interception doctrines. How they used this flexibility will be examined in the case studies.

Similar to undersea warfare, operational tactics using aircraft could support the outranging concept in either a decisive battle or attrition based doctrine. The Japanese stressed the outranging concept in all of their aircraft. Japanese aircraft at the start of the war included the Mitsubishi "zero"(1,930 nm), the Aichi "Val" dive bomber (970 nm), and the Yokosuka "Judy" (1,320 nm). Compared to the F4F "Wildcat" (860 nm), TBD "Devastator"(435 nm), and SBD "Dauntless" (464 nm), Japanese aircraft could outrange any U.S. aircraft.[12] Only later in the war, using large land-based bombers, could the U.S. exceed the ranges posted by Japanese aircraft.

While it is clear that Japanese aircraft could clearly outrange American aircraft, the more salient debate revolved around the primacy of the aircraft carrier as the central capital ship. Many influential officers in the Imperial Navy argued that aircraft had overtaken the battleship. By 1939 the attack range of a Japanese combined air wing was about 200 nm, far beyond the range of any "big gun."[13] The debate continued throughout the war and the subsequent division in thinking would become a critical element in operational planning.

The Japanese incorporated other operational tactics into their plans. However, other elements of operational level tactics such as maneuver, massing of force, phasing, and sequencing can all be seen to support the outranging concept.

**Training.** Overall training for the Japanese was quite good. Throughout the war they continued to demonstrate excellent seamanship and airmanship even in the face of tremendous adversity. Their surface training continued to stress the decisive night engagement. This skill was

---

[10] Ito and Pineau, p. 51.

[11] Hirama, p. 67.

[12] Aircraft information consolidated from Donald Macintyre, History of World War II, book 3, Aircraft Carrier: The Majestic Weapon (New York: Ballantine Books: 1968) and Idem., History of World War II, book 11, Leyte Gulf: Armada in the Pacific (New York: Ballantine Books:1969).

[13] Hirama, p. 70.

amply demonstrated throughout the war, most notably during the battle of Savo Island in August 1942.

Japanese aviation training was excellent at the start of the war. They had commenced formal flight training in 1920 and by December 1941, over 3, 500 naval aviators and 2,500 army aviators were ready for combat. At the start of the war, navy and army pilots entered combat with over over 700 and 500 flight hours respectively. However, both the quantity and quality of pilot production decreased as the war progressed so that by the end of the war most navy and army pilots entered combat with less than 100 flight hours.[14] And as most aviators will agree, that is barely enough time to feel comfortable in the cockpit.

Besides the declining quality of aviators reaching the fleet, Japanese naval aviation suffered in two additional key areas which were directly related to training. First, reconnaissance and more importantly, its sister skill, recognition were very poor throughout the war. It is difficult to accurately identify ships at sea from any air platform, especially in a combat situation. But couple this inherent difficulty with a lack of proper recognition and reporting training, and the likelihood of generating inaccurate reconnaissance reports is substantially increased. Second, while the early cadre of aviators received night carrier landing training, they were far from proficient, and as we shall see in the case studies, contributed to the failure of their operational plans.

As a result of the limited quantity and quality of aviation training-- the Kamikaze units will emerge. The Japanese will come to draw upon the "Bushido" warrior spirit in an act of selfless sacrifice to compensate for shortfalls in training and dwindling aircraft assets.

A similar shortfall occurred in the submarine force as a result of training and submarine design. The main focus of submarine design was on making a formidable war machine-- not on habitability. As Masanori Ito points out, "the confined quarters might have been adequate if there had been enough men to rotate the crews for proper rest and rehabilitation after each mission. But there were never enough trained men. As time passed, the efficiency of submarines deteriorated even faster than their numbers decreased... the results were disastrous."[15]

Lastly, training stressed unquestioning obedience at all levels and all ranks. This training

[14] United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS). Japanese Air Power (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 35-36.

[15] Ito and Pineau, p. 24.

included "standing prohibitions against retreat, surrender, and being taken alive."[16] While this intense devotion to duty and unwavering discipline is a tremendous asset to the commander in the field, at the higher levels of planning and policymaking it hinders effective debate, stifles legitimate criticism, and prevents probing evaluation of plans and policies. This intense obedience existed, to varying degrees, among the Japanese officers charged with formulating operational plans. The result is that operational plans with essential flaws were often initiated without anyone clearly and forcefully challenging their validity and applicability.

Leadership is the most challenging element, of the four, in the analytical framework to review. Partially because leadership styles vary considerably among individual commanders, and partly because only fragmentary information exists on Japanese wartime naval leaders. With the exception of Yamamoto and other select naval leaders, little is known. However, from their actions in battle, three general qualities emerge.

First, in part, due to their early training, they displayed intense obedience and devotion to duty. Their sense of commitment and unswerving dedication was unsurpassed. Time after time, they engaged U.S. forces even when the odds were decidedly against them--which, occasionally, paid-off. However, this had a negative side too. Often when it appeared that there was not a logical or operational reason to press ahead, many Japanese naval leaders may have needlessly endangered their units-- there by jeopardizing vital assets which could have been used more effectively elsewhere.

Second, it is clear from a review of the case studies, and other key naval engagements, that Japanese commanders were skilled and accomplished seamen. They were very capable of executing complex naval maneuvers and following operational plans.

Third, many Japanese leaders possessed an underlying sense of trepidation born of the material inferiority most had lived through during the 1920's and 1930's. I believe this thought never left them and will emerge at critical junctions in several key battles. It is this tension, created by their intense sense of duty and commitment on one side, and this underlying trepidation on the other, that makes Japanese leaders so complex and challenging to fully understand. Nonetheless, it is an important element-- one which will directly impact the Japanese in their operational planning.

[16] Dan van der Vat, The Pacific Campaign: The U.S. - Japanese Naval War 1941-1945 (New York: Simon & Schuster: 1991), p. 44.

It is worth noting that the Navy sent its most promising officers to tours of duty in Washington as Naval Attachés. Admiral Yamamoto and Vice Admiral Nagumo both had tours in the United States. Many other officers had the same opportunity.[17] This gave the Japanese naval leadership direct understanding and a unique insight into America that few U.S. wartime leaders had of Japan.

It is important to recognize the spiritual and moral leadership Admiral Yamamoto provided to the Imperial Navy. It was through his strength of character and influence that many critical debates on policy and strategy were resolved in the first years of the war. His initial reluctance to go to war with the United States is acknowledged by many and was based on his personal and accurate assessment of projected American war fighting potential. But once Japan was committed to war, he was determined to win the "decisive naval battle."[18] When the transport plane he was embarked on was shot down in April 1943 by U.S. P-38's, the Imperial Navy suffered a major defeat. No other naval leader could completely take his place and the unifying effect he provided was lost.

[17] Mitsuo Fuchida, and Masatake Okumiya, Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute: 1955), p. 34.

[18] Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy : 1941-1945 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute: 1978), p. 6.

## CHAPTER III

## CASE STUDIES

**Historical Perspective.** To fully understand and review the Japanese operational scheme it is important to place it within the context of the surrounding strategic environment. The Japanese strategic planners continued the debate over whether Japan should adopt an offensive or defensive posture after their tremendous success in the first phase of the Pacific war.[19] However, by early 1942, there were three primary factors influencing the Japanese decision to target both Port Moresby and Midway. First, although the attack on Pearl Harbor had been a tactical success, the Japanese did not destroy the American carrier force in the Pacific. The carriers were the only remaining element preventing Japanese naval hegemony in the Pacific. It was felt that by May of 1942 they were just "one battle away" and that controlling the SLOC to Australia, capturing Midway, and destroying the carrier fleet would permanently tip the strategic balance of power in favor of Japan.[20] Thus, it was imperative that the Japanese engage and destroy the U.S. carrier force in a decisive battle. The Japanese correctly assumed that the only way to "lure out" the American carriers was to threaten vital U.S. strategic points. Both Port Moresby and Midway were perceived as vital points.

Second, the Japanese had set up along side their "co-prosperity sphere" a line of strategic defense that would guarantee the security of the Japanese homeland. On 18 April 1942 this security was boldly challenged when a squadron of 16 Army B-25 bombers, under the command of Colonel Jimmy Doolittle, launched from the USS HORNET to attack targets in Tokyo and other Japanese cities.[21] This action was the catalyst that dispelled any disagreement among senior Japanese strategists on the significance of securing an expanded defense perimeter or the necessity to attack Midway. As one Japanese source relays, "The greatest importance of the Doolittle raid lay in its immediate effect on the controversy still going on over the Combined Fleet plan for an assault on Midway...., the raid steeled its determination to press for early execution of the operation as originally planned."[22]

---

[19] Fuchida and Okumiya, p. 48.

[20] John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Viking, 1990), pp. 266-267.

[21] Duane Schultz, The Doolittle Raid (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 292-295.

[22] Fuchida and Okumiya, p. 71.

Third, the Japanese had decided to confront the U.S., in part, based on its perception that the Imperial Navy had reached a level of parity with U.S. Navy. The "window of opportunity" to defeat the U.S. Navy would rapidly close by 1942 when the full effect of the United State's Two-Ocean Expansion Act of 1940 would shift the balance of naval power in America's favor. Thus, it was imperative that the Japanese seek a decisive naval victory that would compel the U.S. to negotiate a settlement which would acquiesce to Japan's primary demands in the Pacific.

The motive behind the defense of the Philippines was much different from the considerations behind New Guinea or Midway. By 1944, the Imperial Navy was showing signs of severe strain. Still reeling from their dismal losses in June during the battle of the Marianas, they estimated that the defense of the Philippines represented their "last chance" at a decisive victory. Although strategy based on the decisive battle doctrine had produced perilous results, many were still looking for that one chance to crush the enemy with a single blow.

Thus, within this historical context, the overall long-term, strategic guidance was established from which the operational plans were formulated.

Case Study #1: Operation MO (The Battle of Coral Sea). The operational objectives for Operation MO, were threefold: [1] Invade Port Moresby and establish a naval and air base there; [2] Establish Tulagi, a small island across from Guadalcanal, as a seaport base; and [3] set a trap for the U.S. Pacific fleet responding to the Port Moresby invasion and destroy decisively, those forces encountered.[23] The objectives would be secured by three main forces. The Port Moresby Invasion force was broken into five smaller forces with Vice Admiral Inouye in overall command. A significantly smaller invasion force led by Rear Admiral Shima was to secure Tulagi, and lastly the carrier strike force under Vice Admiral Takagi was to provide support for the invasion as well as intercept any U.S. forces sent to challenge the invasion. Appendix I provides detailed organization of the Japanese forces for Operation MO.

It is in the operational plan for the invasion of Port Moresby that the split in doctrine will first present a problem. Operational plans should always support the overall strategic goal. What was the primary strategic goal? Close scrutiny suggests that expanding the defense perimeter to the south, for reasons previously discussed, was paramount. Why then did the Japanese include destruction of the fleet as a secondary operational goal? This resulted from split in doctrinal thinking where both concerns were addressed by supporting the attrition based strategy through

[23] Dull, p. 118.

expanding and strengthening the defense perimeter, while concurrently seeking the decisive battle. More importantly, the consequence of this split was that it forced the Japanese to plan for a split in operational fires. Instead of massing all operational fires to achieve the operational goal of securing Port Moresby, a large portion of the operational fire potential stayed with Takagi's carrier strike force to meet the incoming U.S. fleet. In addition, Yamamoto believed that this operation would be easy and only a relatively small force was allotted to Operation MO which further limited the operational fire that could be directed to support the invasion.

The operational tactics used in the plan for Operation MO also caused problems. First, as with all Japanese plans, surprise was a key element. Had the Japanese been able to quickly establish air bases in the Coral Sea area, from which effective numbers of long-range, land-based aircraft could sortie, it would have been very difficult for the U.S. to muster enough forces, this early in the war, to challenge them. Operational phasing was also key here in that it was important to establish these bases and secure Tulagi and Port Moresby before U.S. forces entered the Coral Sea.

However, the critical element of surprise was lost as American cryptologists had broken the Japanese naval code, JN-25. U.S. Naval Intelligence had suggested that the Japanese were planning an operation south of Raboul, and by late April, the missing pieces began to emerge--Port Moresby was the target.[24] With the element of surprise negated, the phasing of the plan was interrupted by the unexpected arrival by Task Force 17. Not only was the phasing interrupted but, perhaps more significantly, it shocked the Japanese carrier task force, who, for the first time had to confront one or two American aircraft carriers in the first-ever, carrier-to-carrier naval battle. This factor disrupted the original plan. And as it did not contain a contingency or branch, the entire operation was at risk.

One way in which the loss of the element of surprise could have been overcome was through the proper use of the Japanese operational tactic of outranging. Methodical use of air reconnaissance could have detected TF 17 as they approached the area. However, most planes were attacking Port Moresby in support of the landing. Ironically, this was an inherent paradox in the Japanese plan. While aircraft were needed to support the landing at Port Moresby, they were also needed simultaneously to reconnoiter the area to the east to alert the Japanese carrier task force of the incoming U.S. fleet. Only by substantially increasing the number of aircraft committed to

[24] Walter Lord, Incredible Victory (New York: Harper Row, 1967), pp. 17-19.

this operation could this problem be solved. But as a large number of aircraft were being held for the upcoming operation at Midway, increasing the number of aircraft for Operation MO was unlikely.

Part of the Japanese plan for Operation MO called for the use of submarines to reconnoiter the area. Of the 21 submarines available to deploy in offensive operations in early 1942, only six were assigned to operation MO while the remaining 15 went to support the Midway invasion. At no time during Operation MI was TF17 sighted by a Japanese submarine.[25] This is not surprising given the tremendously large area these six submarines were assigned to patrol. This was the first occasion the Japanese had to use their submarines in the interceptor-attrition role, and due to lack of realistic expectations, they lost the opportunity to engage the enemy fleet.

At this point in the war the Japanese were relatively better trained than their American counterparts. Moreover, most had gained valuable experience and were seasoned in combat operations through their earlier victories. Of the 12 units operating at Tulagi, only one destroyer, two patrol boats, and a transport were lost during the attack of over 70 U.S. planes. This is a tribute to the solid training they had received and is even more impressive considering no air cover was provided to these units.

In addition, the training of Japanese aviators was also quite solid. As a direct result of action against TF 17 by aviators launching from ZUIKAKU and SHOKAKU, the LEXINGTON, fleet oiler NEOSHO, and the destroyer SIMS were all sunk. This was accomplished by pilots flying in poor weather and without the aid of any type of radar.

Overall, the training the Japanese had received supported the operational plan. They were ready and capable, collectively and individually, to carry out the plan. However, two aspects of their training would not support the overall mission.

First, Japanese pilots had received instruction and training in night carrier landing. As Captain Yamaoka, Operations Officer 5th Air Flotilla relayed, "...about two thirds of all pilots were thoroughly trained at night."[26] As all naval aviators who have landed aboard a ship know--this is an extremely perishable skill. Thus it is likely that the Japanese pilots were far from proficient. This argument is supported by the fact that eleven Japanese pilots were killed returning

[25] Richard W. Bates, The Battle of Coral Sea, May 01 to May 11, 1942: Strategical and Tactical Analysis (Newport: Naval War College: 1947), p. 15.

[26] USSBS, Interrogation, p. 54.

to their carriers in the dark following late afternoon action on 7 May. Operational employment of Japanese aircraft thus became limited as attacks had to be completed and all planes recovered before dark. It is noteworthy that earlier that same evening, six Japanese pilots tried to land on YORKTOWN mistaking her for a Japanese carrier.[27] This event betrays a more serious shortfall in Japanese training-- recognition of targets.

As discussed previously, the recognition skills of Japanese pilots were poor. During the battle of Coral Sea, Japanese aviators consistently made errors in reporting the type of ships they had spotted and attacked. So much so that they incorrectly identified NEOSHO and SIMS as a carrier and cruiser. As a result, Vice Admiral Takagi ordered a massive strike against these two ships missing an opportunity to engage the carriers in TF17 who were about to attack the Japanese carrier SHOHO- a part of Rear Admiral Goto's Cover Force.[28] This shortfall in recognition and identification, in part due to inadequate training, proved to be costly and directly impacted the outcome of the battle.

Japanese leadership directed the formation of the plan for Operation MO. Both Operation MO, and Operation MI [Midway] were planned nearly simultaneously. Naval leaders did not want to divert assets to support operations in the Southwest Pacific and were focusing their efforts on Midway. However, at this point in the war the Japanese Army had a larger voice in the formation of overall strategy and the Navy agreed to support the invasion of Port Moresby. They did this for two reasons. First, naval leaders felt very confident that Operation MO would be easy, partially because they did not anticipate any formidable opposition, and because their confidence level was at an all-time high. Second, the Army did not fully support the plan to attack Midway. So to appease the Army and win support for the Midway operation, the Navy agreed to support Operation MO with a less-than-optimum number of forces.

Beyond the planning aspect of this operation, Japanese leadership had a significant impact on the outcome of the battle. First, Rear Admiral Hara seems to have exhibited the dichotomy of character described previously. His actions revealed a mix of a fierce sense of honor and underlying trepidation. As Bates point out he suffered and "unexpected loss of face.. and struck out almost blindly" when SHOHO was sunk by foolishly launching aircraft against TF17 when their location was undetermined. Conversely, when he felt that both American carriers had been

[27] Samuel Eliot Morison, The Two-Ocean War ( Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), p. 144.
[28] Dull, p. 124.

sunk, he cut-short the attack and withdrew.[29]

Second, when Vice Admiral Inouye was told of the carrier action to the east of Jomard Pass, he stopped the southward movement of the invasion force and eventually called off the operation. Perseverance is perhaps the most important quality for a commander leading an invasion force. Without perseverance on the part of Inouye, the leadership aspect of the invasion plan had a fatal flaw. It was Yamamoto himself, who, upon learning that Japanese forces were disengaging, countermanded Inouye and ordered that Japanese forces seek and utterly destroy all remaining enemy forces.[30]

The Japanese were able to win a tactical victory during the battle of Coral Sea by inflicting more damage to the U.S. fleet than they themselves received. However, more significantly, shortfalls in doctrine, tactics, training, and leadership contributed to the operational failure of the plan. The primary operational goal of invading Port Moresby was not attained and while the plan did draw out the U.S. fleet, the ensuing battle was far from decisive. Of the three operational objectives to be met, only the establishment of Tulagi as a base of operations was fully achieved. The outcome of Operation MO will have implications during the next major battle in the Pacific--Midway.

Case Study #2: Operation MI (The Battle of Midway). The operational objectives for the Japanese at Midway were clear-- "The first and more limited objective was the seizure of Midway itself as an advance air base to facilitate the early detection of enemy forces operating westward from the Hawaiian Islands. The second, much broader objective was to draw out the United States Pacific Fleet's remaining strength so that it could be engaged and destroyed in a decisive battle."[31] It is important to note that the Japanese envisioned securing Midway prior to any major fleet engagement.[32]

The operational plan called for the Main Force to destroy the enemy fleet by decisive naval action and to support both the Mobile Force and the Occupation Force. The Mobile Force was to destroy the enemy fleet by decisive naval action and to support the Midway Occupation Force by air attacks on aircraft, surface craft, and base facilities on Midway Island. The Occupation Force

[29] Bates, Coral Sea, pp. 124-125.
[30] Dull, p. 128.
[31] Fuchida and Okumiya, p. 78.
[32] Ibid, p. 86.

was assigned the task of capturing Midway.

The Northern Force nominally had three primary missions. First, it was to invade principle points in the Western Aleutians and to destroy U.S. installations there. Second, it was tasked with protecting the northern flank of the forces operating around Midway. Third, and perhaps most significantly, it was designed to be a diversionary force. Appendix II provides the task force organization for Operation MI.

The split in Japanese doctrine that was present during Operation MO was superficially resolved by the time the plans for Midway were finalized. The Japanese were firmly committed to seeking the decisive battle. However, even though the split in doctrine was resolved, two other questions arise: What did the Japanese see as the capital ship (the operational COG)? And how would the decisive battle be conducted?

Following the battle of Coral Sea, the Japanese believed ENTERPRISE, HORNET, and SARATOGA were the only carriers ready for combat action.[33] They correctly understood the carrier's position as the American "center of gravity" [COG]. In 1942, this was quite a conceptual leap as the battleship was still considered, by many, the capital ship of the fleet. It is ironic that the Japanese considered the American carriers as the COG, while still believing that the battleship was their principal capital ship. This is evidenced in the way they planned to redeploy the five main forces to intercept and defeat the U.S. fleet. Admiral Yamamoto's Main Force Main Body, which contained the principal battleships, was to be 600 miles northwest of Midway. A subgroup of the Main Force, the Guard Force, would position itself 500 miles north of Yamamoto's group. Vice Admiral Nagumo's carriers would be in a position 300 miles east providing a screen for Yamamoto's group . The Second Carrier Strike Force, a subset of the Northern Force would detach and proceed from the Aleutians to a point 300 miles east of the Guard Force. Lastly, three submarine cordons would be established using 15 submarines from Submarine Squadrons One,Three, and Five.[34] It is clear from this arrangement of forces that the Japanese firmly believed that the battleship remained the heart of their fleet. As Captain Fuchida points out the whole plan for Midway rested on an obsolete concept, still dominant in the Japanese Combined Fleet Headquarters, that "battleships rather than carriers constituted the main battle strength of the

[33] Ibid, p. 79. And Richard W. Bates, The Battle of Midway including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942, Strategical and Tactical Analysis (Newport: Naval War College, 1948), p. 31.

[34] Fuchida and Okumiya, pp. 86-87.

Fleet.....and the fallacy of this concept was to be driven home with tragic force."[35]

Similar to the plan for Operation MO, the plan for Midway rested on surprise and deception. And like Operation MO, through code breaking and intelligence efforts, the U.S. anticipated the Japanese moves and sortied a formidable fleet, which included three carriers, to arrive at Midway prior to the arrival of Japanese forces. Thus, with the loss of the element of surprise, the phasing for the operation would be completely dislocated. Phasing was an especially critical element in the plan for Operation MI. The first phase of the operation around Midway would focus on the invasion and capture of the island itself. Once Midway was secured, the four battle forces would reposition themselves around Midway to intercept and destroy the enemy. In addition, Japanese shore-based air would help defend Midway and would provide critical long-range air reconnaissance.[36] It is important to remember that any major naval engagement with U.S. forces was planned to occur after Midway was occupied. This over-reliance on surprise as a main element of the plan would once again prove fatal for the Imperial Navy.

Operational deception was also compromised during Operation MI. If deception is to be effective it must first be perceived as a plausible and realistic move, and second, it has to be convincing. The attack on the Aleutians was indeed a plausible move for the Imperial Navy and from a Japanese perspective, a feign toward Alaska should have sent the U.S. reeling. Without being able to read Japanese operational messages, it is doubtful the U.S. would have been able to ascertain that Midway, and not the Aleutians, was the primary target.[37] But the critical element here is that while a main Japanese thrust against the Aleutians was plausible and feasible, it was not believed by the Americans. Thus, any ostensible gains the Japanese might have realized by a deceptive move north was negated by the U.S. Navy's ability to "read the mail."

However, this deceptive move had another effect. It forced Yamamoto to divide his forces. Instead of massing every available unit to participate in what he himself envisioned as the "decisive battle" that was planned for Midway, a sizable portion of his force was operating well north, away from the main area of engagement.

Reconnaissance outranging was also a critical aspect of this plan and focused on the effective detection of the U.S. force heading to Midway. This was to be accomplished by both

[35] Ibid, p.98.
[36] Ibid, pp. 86-87.
[37] Lord, pp. 17-29.

submarines and air patrols. Unlike Coral Sea, an effective number of submarines were included in the plan. Even though they were vulnerable to air attack, the three submarine cordons planned for the area north and south of French Frigate Shoals would have provided the Japanese fleet with valuable information. The air reconnaissance problem was solved in part by using the Japanese Navy's newest long-range aircraft, the Type-2 flying boat.. Flying from bases in the Marshall Islands, the Type-2 would put down in an Atoll en route to Hawaii, refuel from a waiting submarine, then proceed to patrol the Hawaiian Op-Area and report the approach of the U.S. fleet.

However, again, the disruption in the operational phasing caused neither the air or submarine forces to arrive at their designated patrol areas. This negated any outranging advantage the Japanese included in the plan.

The training the Japanese received prior to Midway was quite solid. Throughout the battle, airmen and seamen alike performed admirably. Japanese pilots, once again, displayed their tremendous flying acumen and attacked U.S. ships quite effectively. There were plenty of fully trained aviators to man the air wings.

But similar to their action at Coral Sea, Japanese aviators displayed substandard reconnaissance and recognition skills. Their performance in these areas coupled with a poor search plan presented the Japanese commanders with an inaccurate and misleading operational picture. Japanese leadership and judgment was primarily responsible for the formulation of the inadequate search plan. Confident that the U.S. fleet would not be in the area prior to the initial attack on Midway, they did not emphasize reconnaissance in the early stages of the operation.

Vice Admiral Nagumo, the officer in tactical command of the aircraft carriers, was a confident and aggressive leader.[38] Unlike many of the other Japanese commanders, he did not display much trepidation. He was ideally suited to carry out the operational plan for the attack on Midway and lead the Japanese air effort in the decisive battle. But it was his uncharacteristic indecisiveness and clouded focus on the primary goal of Operation MI, which led to one of the most crucial events in the Pacific War.

When the first attack wave over Midway reported that a second strike on the island was required, Nagumo ordered AKAGI's and KAGA's planes to change armaments from torpedoes and armor piercing bombs to fragmentation bombs for use at Midway. He did this for two reasons. First, he had not expected to find U.S. carriers in the area at that time. This

[38] Nagumo had commanded the Pearl Harbor Strike Force in December 1941.

preconception was reinforced by the absence of any contact reports from his search planes. Second, he did not focus on the primary operational objective– destruction of the U.S. fleet. When one of his search planes reported the presence of at least one U.S. carrier, he changed his mind and ordered the aircraft arming on the hangar deck up to the flight deck in whatever way they were configured and ordered the flight deck aircraft below to rearm for attack against the U.S. ships. This decision was the greatest operational miscalculation at Midway, and perhaps, the entire Pacific war.

The final outcome of Operation MI was far from what the Japanese had visualized. In the four-day battle that ensued, they lost four carriers, a heavy cruiser, 322 aircraft, and over 5,000 men. By contrast, the U.S. lost one carrier, a destroyer, 150 aircraft, and 300 men.[39] They had, as planned, engaged the U.S. Pacific Fleet in a decisive battle, but the clear victors were the Americans. The only long term gain by the Japanese were two islands in the Aleutians, which were so insignificant that the U.S. never bothered to retake them.[40]

Case Study #3: Operation Sho (The Battle of Leyte Gulf). The operational plan to defend the Philippines against the impending U.S invasion there occurred in a strategic environment much different from either Operation MO or MI. First, Operation Sho [victory] was conceived at a time when the strength of Japanese forces were at their nadir. Second, planning for operation Sho would be quite compressed. The Japanese had just suffered a major defeat during the battle of the Philippine Sea. They had counted on a great victory there, and no plans for future operations were prepared.[41] Lastly, when formulating plans for Operation MO and MI, the Japanese had to plan to encounter only two to four American carriers. Here they would confront over 32 U.S. carriers of all types.

The overall operational objective was to prevent U.S. forces from landing on the Philippines in support of the larger strategic goal of defending the Japanese homeland. An additional operational goal was to seek out the U.S. fleet and, once again, meet them in a decisive battle.

Japanese planners were quite encumbered in their planning. They did not believe the

[39] The Japanese carriers AKAGI, HIRYU, SORYU, KAGA.

[40] Charles Messenger, The Chronological Atlas of World War Two (New York: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 104-105.

[41] Tomiji Koyanagi, "The Battle of Leyte Gulf," in The Japanese Navy in World War II, introduction by Raymond O'Connor (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1969), p. 108.

Imperial fleet would be ready for another major engagement until the Spring of 1945. However, it was clear that the U.S. Pacific Fleet would be bearing down on the Philippines by late Fall 1944. The broad operational scheme of the original plan called for the First Striking Force, under Vice Admiral Kurita, to intercept the landing force and annihilate them. Vice Admiral Ozawa's carrier division would come from the northeast to draw the U.S. carrier force away from Leyte and its protection of the U.S. landing force. Kurita was to reach Leyte through San Bernardino Strait via the Sibuyan Sea. A southern force under Rear Admiral Nishimura, with a follow-on force under Rear Admiral Shima would transit the Surigao Strait south of Leyte Gulf. Land-based air would be provided by Vice Admiral Onishi's Fifth Base Air Force in the Philippines and by Vice Admiral Fukudome's Sixth Base Air Force out of Formosa.

Again, like the two previous case studies, the split in doctrine will negatively impact the operational plan. First, was this an offensive or defensive operation? Admiral Toyoda, Chief-of-Staff of the Naval General Staff, had directed that the fleet intercept and "destroy the enemy transports before they disassemble." And if this was impossible "to engage and destroy the enemy in their anchorage." In addition, the First and Second Air Fleets were to "conduct surprise attacks on the carriers and transports." But Kurita's staff was disturbed by this and asked Combined Fleet Headquarters for clarification of Toyoda's intent. They queried that according to the order "the primary targets of the First Striking Force are enemy transport, but if by chance carriers come within range of our force, may we, in cooperation with shore-based air, engage the carrier and then return to annihilate the transport?" To this question, Combined Fleet said, "yes."[42] Thus, even among the senior staffs, the operational plan did not have a definite direction. Moreover, the plan that resulted required three separate surface forces to transit through two risky and potentially well-defended straits in support of an ill-defined operational objective.

In addition, even this late in the war, battleships were still seen as being able to effectively win the decisive naval engagement. However, even though the Japanese had come to appreciate the carrier's role in naval warfare, they nonetheless held steadfast to the belief that their battleships and heavy cruisers could still win a decisive victory. At this point in the war, holding on to his belief may have been born of desperation, as they simply could not match America's carrier force in late 1944.

[42] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

The operational level tactics envisioned for the plan also created potential difficulties. This essay has analyzed just two of the many Japanese operational plans which relied heavily on operational surprise. However at Leyte, operational surprise could not be employed by the Japanese. While they were still looking for the decisive battle, for them, Leyte was inherently a defensive operation. They could only strike once they ascertained where and when U.S. forces would land on the Philippines. Even Vice Admiral Ozawa's carrier force, which had some offensive potential was there "not to attack, but to be attacked."[43]

In the two previous case studies in which surprise was an integral part of the Japanese operational plans-- those plans failed. This suggests that operational surprise was not all that effective. However, where operational surprise may have been an important aspect of the Japanese plans is in building morale and giving the troops a psychological edge. The absence of this element from Operation Sho contributed to the diminished psychological momentum the Japanese experienced at Leyte.

In the plan for Leyte, the Japanese also lost their potential advantage in outranging. Land-based air, if used effectively, could have provided the critical outranging needed to counter the U.S. carrier fleet. However, significant support from shore-based air power was lost because of the limited numbers of planes, poor training, and most significantly, difficulty in coordinating air support between the units ashore and forces afloat. With this loss, any hope of outranging the U.S. fleet through use of air power vanished.

The Japanese tried desperately to enhance the outranging capability of their surface ships. While at Hiroshima Bay both Ozawa's and Kurita's fleets were retrofitted with the first Japanese radar sets.[44] But with only limited training and experience in this new technology, this action proved to be too-little, too-late. Thus, in the air and on the surface, Japanese forces entered Operation Sho clearly outranged by the U.S. Fleet.

Lastly, the final plan called for four separate forces of varying size, and with specialized strengths and weaknesses, to converge on the enemy fleet. To mass operational fires, flawless synchronization and coordination were vital. But problems with converging these forces were compounded by the local "terrain" which required they transit through two very narrow and potentially well defended straits. Complicating this further was the fact that the plan contained no

[43] Ito and Pineau, p. 145.

[44] Ibid., p. 113.

contingencies for delays or diversions. Thus, when Kurita's fleet was stalled on the morning of 24 October as a result of attack, Nishimura's force was slowed to 13 knots so as to arrive at Leyte in synch with Kurita. This invited attack from patrol boats and submarines and eventually spelled doom for Nishimura's force.

Several elements related to training also impacted the Japanese plan. While at Lingga Anchorage, an area just across the strait from Singapore, the Imperial Fleet trained furiously. Tomiji Koyanagi, Kurita's chief-of-staff at the time, believed that overall, training during this period was quite satisfactory.[45] Relentlessly, the officers and sailors trained for, what many believed, would be the "last stand" of the Imperial Navy. Night surface action was stressed. Their best chance of defeating U.S. forces was to engage them in a night surface battle using the 18.1 inch guns on YAMATO and MUSASHI.[46]

Another key phase of the Japanese plan, one for which they had practiced and thought about at Lingga, was breaking into the U.S. anchorage during the invasion. Optimally, this should be done while the U.S. fleet was landing personnel and equipment ashore, which they would no doubt do during daylight hours. But if the Japanese attacked during the day their battleships and cruisers were quite vulnerable to attack from U.S. carrier planes. Conversely, the difficulties of penetrating the anchorage with large ships, at night were tremendous. Thus, the Japanese plan contained one operational task which was almost impossible to effectively accomplish with the operational tactics proposed. This was a serious conceptual flaw in the Japanese plan.

Evidence of the tremendous difficulty in intercepting and attacking during the day can be seen in the action of Kurita's force when they encountered several U.S. carriers in the early morning of 25 October. In a dash to close the gap between his forces and the American carriers on the horizon, Kurita's force sped forward without any coordination and were spread out over an area in excess of 15 miles.[47] This, in part, can be attributed to a breakdown in tactical procedures as a result of insufficient training.

As noted, effective land-based air power was essential if the Japanese plan for Leyte had any chance of succeeding. As Inoguchi and Nakajima point out, "Japan's only offensive resources

[45] Koyanagi, p. 109.
[46] Ito and Pineau, p. 115.
[47] Ibid., p. 152.

were her land-based air fleets, whose pilots were pitifully inexperienced."[48] These pilots had virtually no combat experience, and perhaps even more significantly, possessed only minimal flight time. Out of this serious shortfall in training and with the absolute sense of desperation the Japanese felt-- the Kamikaze corps were born. As Ito and Pineau remark, "Almost daily, men were killed in practice landing and takeoffs from carrier decks. Observing these accidents, the pilots themselves began to feel that if they were going to die on carrier decks, it would be much better to die crashing into the decks of enemy carriers."[49]

Thus, Leyte Gulf was the first time American forces encountered the Kamikaze pilot. Of the 93 fighters and 57 bombers the Japanese used on 25 October in conventional attacks against the U.S. Fleet, none inflicted any damage. However, of the ten "special attack" planes launched on the 25th of October, five scored direct hits on U.S. ships, causing notable damage as the incredulous Americans stood by dazed and bewildered.[50] It is safe to say that the Kamikaze corps represent the most serious and grave response to poor training and inferior numbers in all of military history.

I believe that the critical failure in Japanese leadership was the single most important element leading to their defeat at Leyte Gulf. From the very start of the planning for Leyte, the leadership failed to recognize that the probability of preventing a U.S. landing on the Philippines was near zero. And regardless of how noble and gallant it is to stand up to an overwhelming foe, it is pure folly to do so when there is absolutely no realistic hope of winning. Many of the senior Japanese leaders felt that this would be their final sortie. Vice Admiral Nishimura had severe personal reservations over the chances of the plan working, he was nonetheless committed to the operation. Nishimura had lost his only son Teiji, at the Philippines, and though the plan for Leyte was near hopeless, he may have welcomed the opportunity "to have an assignment which would permit him to die nobly and join his son." [51] One of the most solemn responsibilities a commander has to his troops is to determine when his forces have had enough and cannot reasonably expect to prevail, and then, to take action to ensure their safety and security.

---

[48] Rikihei Inoguchi, and Tadishi Nakajima, "The Kamikaze Attack Corps," in The Japanese Navy in World War II, introduction by Raymond O'Connor (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1969), p. 120.

[49] Ito and Pineau, pp. 180-181.

[50] Inoguchi and Nakajima, p. 125.

[51] Ito and Pineau, p. 134.

But effective leadership suffered in another way too. Admiral Toyoda, Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet, was not present at the battle. Many officers felt that he should come from Japan to lead the fleet at this most crucial time.[52] Complicating this was Combined Fleet Staff's indecision during the planning phase of operations, as well as their tendency to try to control the battle from the beach. This was not only fruitless, but added confusion to the action and infuriated those fighting the battle at sea.

In summary, from its inception, Operation Sho suffered from compressed, unrealistic, and insufficient planning. This, coupled with significant shortfalls in training and less-than-optimum leadership, led to the eventual demise of the Imperial Fleet at Leyte– the last real battle they would fight. Asked if the plan for Operation Sho was the best that could have been formulated given the forces available, Vice Admiral Ozawa replied, "I think that was the best plan which we could apply but not the best theoretical plan...(but) I think it was the best plan under the conditions."[53]

[52] Koyanagi, p. 109.

[53] USSBS, Interrogations, p. 50.

## CHAPTER IV

## LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Common Elements of Japanese Operational Plans. This essay has primarily focused on those factors in the Japanese plans that contributed to their failure. In fairness to the Imperial Navy, there were many elements not discussed here that helped the Japanese meet the materially superior U.S. in a protracted war waged across the breadth of the Pacific.

But what were the common negative elements present in each case study? From the foregoing review, four main elements emerge:

First, the Japanese over-emphasized the elements of surprise and deception in all of their operational planning. There were no branches or contingency plans to fall back on when the element of surprise was lost at both Coral Sea and Midway. The Japanese simply did not have alternate plans in place should the element of surprise be lost. At Leyte Gulf, when operational surprise was nearly impossible, they started the operation from a point of psychological inferiority.

Deception too, was an integral part of their plans. It is not difficult to postulate that had Yamamoto retained the fleet he sent to the Aleutians and massed them with his own forces present around Midway, the outcome of this crucial battle may have been quite different.

Second, the split in doctrine had repercussions throughout the entire Imperial Navy. The split between the decisive battle and the attrition-interception doctrine, negatively impacted the way operations were initially planned, to the way they were eventually executed. Japanese war planners were never fully committed to either doctrine, even though Yamamoto had, in the early days of the war, pushed for a strategy based on the decisive victory doctrine. Had they fully committed to either doctrine, operational level thinking may have focused on different operational level tactics and put into place more effective plans to counter U.S. forces.

Third, throughout the war the Japanese suffered from poor intelligence. On the operational level this was manifested in the poor reconnaissance schemes in the operational plans. On the tactical level, this was manifested in the absolute poor recognition of enemy surface units and in the subsequent inaccurate reporting of these units by aviators. In defense of the Japanese aviators, U.S. forces suffered from this same deficiency. However, the U.S. fleet was able to overcome

this on the operational level by being able to read the encoded Japanese naval message traffic. Thus, Japanese collection and application of intelligence information at both the operational and tactical levels suffered.

Lastly, the Japanese operational tactics written into their plans were not effective in combating the U.S. fleet. The decisive battle, which most Japanese believed "should" take place during a night surface engagement, never occurred-- primarily because U.S. forces had outgrown this tactic and had shifted their operational plans accordingly. In naval warfare, it is impossible to meet the enemy using your operational scheme if he retires and does not come forward to engage in battle on your terms. American forces consistently avoided "pure" surface engagements and primarily relied on carrier-based aviation to generate operational fire. However, on those occasions when the U.S. inadvertently or carelessly met the Japanese during a night engagement, most notably at Savo Island, Japanese forces did quite well. But the aircraft carrier had quickly established itself, early on in the war, as the primary capital ship and all operational tactics would revolve around its use. Had the Japanese clearly and forcefully recognized this, their operational plans could have been adjusted accordingly. The battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and Leyte Gulf would have been different.

Key Lessons for Today's Warfighters. What do these lessons tell us today about our own operations and do they have any relevancy for today's war-fighters and planners? I believe they echo four essential themes.

First, doctrine must be unified and agreed upon by all. Doctrine drives all aspects of war planning and fighting. All concerned must fully understand and be committed to this doctrine for a unity of effort to exist. With a clear and forceful doctrine, one which accounts for your strengths and weaknesses and those of your potential enemy, plans which optimize the chances for success can be formulated.

Second, the role of intelligence is as critical today as it was 50 years ago. Many historians have argued that the United State's ability to anticipate Japanese operational movements was the single most important factor in winning the war in the Pacific. Today proper recognition and reconnaissance is not only the job of aviators, but is also the responsibility of a whole host of technicians and operators. From the initial formulation of a plan, to the dynamic execution of that plan, relaying information quickly and accurately to the commander is essential.

Third, the emphasis on operational level surprise should be limited. In today's environment where sophisticated sensors and global, real-time information prevails, achieving operational level surprise will be difficult. There may be instances, depending on the enemy, where surprise could be used effectively. But is should be used as a force multiplier versus an essential aspect of a plan.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, there must be a unity of effort among the leadership. This unity of effort rests on the foundation provided by consistent doctrine, effective planning, and aggressive execution of plans mortared together at the very highest levels of command. Our emphasis on joint planning and execution goes a long way toward achieving this unity of effort-- but it must start from the top to be truly effective.

Had the Japanese been unified in their thinking and planning in early 1941, interaction and discussions between the Army, who were pushing for war with the U.S., and the Navy, who sought to avoid this confrontation, may have led to the decision to avoid a war with America. Upon being interviewed at the end of the war, Vice Admiral Ozawa remarked: "It is my opinion that this war should never have taken place. The present is greatly confused, spiritually as well as materially: and until things settle down a little more, I cannot make any kind of prediction or estimate as to the future."[54]

[54]Ibid., p. 227.

## APPENDIX I

## ORGANIZATION OF JAPANESE 4TH FLEET FOR THE INVASION OF PORT MORESBY

Vice Admiral Inouye, Commander, Japanese 4th Fleet

**PORT MORSEBY INVASION FORCE**

**Transport Force:** Rear Admiral Hara

| | |
|---|---|
| Transports: | 12 |
| Minelayers | 1 |
| Misc. auxiliary craft | |

**Attack Force:** Rear Admiral Kajioka

| | |
|---|---|
| Light cruiser: | 1 |
| Destroyer: | 5 |
| Patrol boat: | 1 |
| Misc. auxiliary craft | |

**Close Cover Support:** Rear Admiral Marumo

| | |
|---|---|
| Light cruisers: | 2 |
| Seaplane tenders: | 2 |
| Gunboats | 3 |

**Close Support Force:** Rear Admiral Goto

| | |
|---|---|
| Light carrier: | 1 |
| Destroyer: | 1 |

**Support Force, Main Body:** Rear Admiral Goto

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy cruisers: | 4 |

**CARRIER STRIKE FORCE:** Vice Admiral Takagi

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy carriers: | 2 |
| Heavy cruisers: | 2 |
| Destroyers: | 6 |

**Submarine Force**

| | |
|---|---|
| Submarines: | 6 |
| Tenders: | 2 |

**TULAGI INVASION FORCE:** Rear Admiral Shima

| | |
|---|---|
| Destroyer: | 2 |
| Minelayers: | 3 |
| Transport | 1 |
| Misc. auxiliary craft | 6 |

Source: Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy : 1941-1945 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute: 1978), pp. 129-130. Richard W. Bates, The Battle of Coral Sea, May 01 to May 11, 1942: Strategical and Tactical Analysis (Naval War College: 1947), Appendix I.

## APPENDIX II

## ORGANIZATION OF JAPANESE FORCES FOR OPERATION MI [The Strike on Midway]

| FORCE | CVs | BBs | Cruisers | Destroyers | Other Ships |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Main Body** Admiral Yamamoto | 1[1] | 3 | 1 | 9 | 2 |
| **1st Carrier Strike Force** Vice Admiral Nagumo | 4[2] | 2 | 2 | 11 | |
| **Midway Occupation Force** Vice Admiral Kondo | 1[3] | 2 | 10 | 20 | 15 Transports[4]<br>2 Seaplane Tenders<br>4 Minesweepers<br>3 Cargo/Supply |
| **Northern [Aleutians] Force** Vice Admiral Hosogaya | 2 | | 8 | 12 | 3 Minesweepers<br>1 Minelayer<br>3 Transports[5] |
| **Advance [Submarine] Force** Vice Admiral Komatsu | | | 1[6] | | 15 Submarines<br>2 Sub tenders |
| **Shore-Based Air Force** Vice Admiral Tsukahara | | | | | **AIRCRAFT**<br>108 Fighters<br>82 Bombers<br>26 Scout and Seaplanes |

Notes:
[1] 8 type-96 bombers
[2] 261 aircraft
[3] 24 aircraft
[4] 5,000 ground troops
[5] 2,450 ground troops
[6] Based in Kwajelein

Source: Table consolidated from Mitsuo Fuchida, and Masatake Okumiya, Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute: 1955), p. 80-84. Richard W. Bates, The Battle of Midway including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942, Strategical and Tactical Analysis (Newport: Naval War College, 1948), pp. 18-33

## APPENDIX III

## ORGANIZATION OF JAPANESE FORCES FOR OPERATION SHO [The Defense of the Philippines]

**FORCE A [Northern Force]: Vice Admiral Kurita**

| | |
|---|---|
| Battleships: | 3 [*Yamato, Mushashi*] |
| Heavy Cruisers: | 6 |
| Light Cruisers: | 1 |
| Destroyers: | 9 |

**FORCE B [Northern Force]: Vice Admiral Kurita**

| | |
|---|---|
| Battleships: | 2 |
| Heavy Cruisers: | 4 |
| Light Cruisers: | 1 |
| Destroyers: | 6 |

**FORCE C [Southern Force]: Vice Admiral Shima**

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy Cruisers: | 2 |
| Light Cruiser | 1 |
| Destroyers: | 4 |

**Attached to FORCE C : Vice Admiral Shima**

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy Cruisers: | 2 |
| Light Cruiser | 1 |
| Destroyers: | 7 |
| Destroyer Transports: | 4 |

**SOUTHERN AREA GUARD FORCE, TRANSPORT FORCE :**
**Vice Admiral Sakonju**

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy Cruisers: | 1 |
| Light Cruiser | 1 |
| Destroyers: | 1 |
| Destroyer Transports: | 4 |

**MOBILE FORCE, STRIKE FORCE : Vice Admiral Ozawa**

| | |
|---|---|
| Heavy Carrier: | 1 |
| Light Carrier: | 3 |
| Battleship/Carriers | 2 |
| Light Cruisers: | 3 |
| Destroyers: | 8 |

**SUPPLY FORCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Destroyer: | 1 |
| Tankers: | 2 |
| Escort vessels: | 6 |

Source: Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy : 1941-1945 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute: 1978), pp. 335-336.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


Barde, Robert E. " The Battle of Midway: A Study in Command." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1971.

Bates, Richard W. The Battle of the Coral Sea, May 1 to May 11 Inclusive, 1942. Strategical and Tactical Analysis. Newport: Naval War College, 1947.

_____. The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942. Strategical and Tactical Analysis. Newport: Naval War College, 1948.

Clausewitz, Carl Von. On War. New York: Penguin, 1968.

Dull, Paul S. A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy [1941-1945]. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978.

Fuchida, Mitsuo; and Masatake, Okumiya. Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1955.

Hirama, Yoichi. "Japanese Naval Preparations of World War II." Naval War College Review, XLIV (Spring 1991), 63-81.

Inoguchi, Rikihei, and Nakajima, Tadashi. "The Kamikaze Attack Corps." In The Japanese Navy in World War II, pp. 116-127. Introduction by Raymond O'Connor. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1969.

Ito, Masanori. The End of the Japanese Imperial Navy. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1962.

Keegan, John. The Second World War. New York: Viking, 1990.

Koyanagi ,Tomiji. "The Battle of Leyte Gulf." In The Japanese Navy in World War II, pp. 106-115. Introduction by Raymond O'Connor. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1969.

Lord, Walter. Incredible Victory. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Macintyre, Donald. History of World War II, Book 3. Aircraft Carrier, the Majestic Weapon. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

_____. History of World War II, Book 11. Leyte Gulf, Armada in the Pacific. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

Messenger ; Charles. The Chronological Atlas of World War Two. New York: Macmillan, 1989.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. The Two-Ocean War. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963.

Prange, Gordon W.; Goldstein, Donald M.; and Dillon, Katherine V. Miracle at Midway. New York: Viking, 1982.

Schultz, Duane. The Doolittle Raid. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Tuleja, Thaddeus V. Climax at Midway. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960.

U.S. Naval Institute. The Japanese Navy in World War II. Introduction and Commentary by Dr. Raymond O'Connor. Annapolis: U.S Naval Institute, 1969.

U.S. Navy. The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947.

U.S Strategic Bombing Survey. Interrogation of Japanese Officials, vol. 1. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946.

_____. Japanese Air Power. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946.

_____. Japanese Air Weapons and Tactics. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947.

van der Vat, Dan. The Pacific Campaign, The U.S.-Japanese Naval War 1941-1945. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Woodward, C. Vann. The Battle for Leyte Gulf. New York: Macmillan Company, 1947.